

THE DYNAMICS OF COMPOSITE CULTURE: EVOLUTION OF AN URBAN SOCIAL IDENTITY IN MUGHAL INDIA

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It is quite a 'modern' trend to place the roots of communal tensions and violence at the doorsteps of the 'medieval' period, and blame it all on a 'medieval mindset'. This trend is discernible not only in journalistic works but also reflected in some serious scholarship. One may find an echo of this, for example, in Christopher Bayly, who, in one of his papers traces the roots of communalism (and riots) to c. 1700.¹

It has been argued that by opting for Persian "as the sole privileged language of the state and its apparatus," during the Mughal period,² an attempt was made to integrate India's complex society. However as a result of 'its Islamic overtones', Persian, like Arabic, was perceived as the 'language of Islam' and thus few in India could recognise it as their own tongue. Hence this choice too 'drove a wedge between the Mughals and the people', and 'the elite Mughal identity which was not necessarily religiously defined then came to acquire an Islamic tinge as well'.³ And here lay the roots of modern communalism.

Recent writings have however put forward a different view. The notion of majority and minority communities, according to Romila Thapar, is a modern, nineteenth century notion, based on the idea of numbers and of representation with reference to the numbers following a particular religion. The notion of a religious community as the primary social unit prevents the possibility of other kinds of classification and of identities, by emphasising the religious identity alone. The treatment of Hindu and Muslim society as monoliths by historians, she says, has tended to ignore the more important questions about these societies such as, how do various religious groups perceive each other?⁴

Muzaffar Alam in one of his papers has shown that the scale of coordination between the Hindu and Muslim under the Mughals was such that 'many of the local Hindu elites began to identify themselves, to a certain degree, not simply with the Mughal state system, but also with the Mughal Persian Culture'. This, according to him, can be explained by the 'religious and cultural traditions' as they matured and grew in medieval times.⁵

Another modern scholar while commenting on the dynamics of this composite Mughal culture, makes a reference to the *Padmâvat*, a story of Alauddin Khalji and Rani Padmavat, a Sri Lankan princess

married to the Chittor ruler Rawal Ratan Singh. It was love story composed in *Awadhi* dialect (*hindavi*) in 1540 by a provincial Muslim mystic, Malik Muhammad Jayasi. This was rendered into chaste Persian by a non-Muslim noble, Anandran Mukhlis in 1739, after the later heard its recital from his servant at the *dargâh* of a Muslim saint. He named his translation as *Hangâma-i 'Ishq*.⁶

Dozens of tales chronicling encounters between Braj poets and Mughal emperors have come down to us. A famous example from the *Caurâśy vaisnavân kṛ vârtā* relates that Surdas enchanted the emperor with his *padas* and then refused to perform at the Mughal court.⁷ While many such narratives may not be true in a historically positivist sense, their sheer abundance suggests a larger composite truth about Brajbhasha poetry being a desired commodity at the Mughal court.

Busch in one of her papers argues that it was during the reign of Akbar that noticeable shifts occurred in North Indian language and literary preferences. The Mughal attention lavished on Persian poets, as pointed out by Muzaffar Alam, was one. Another was that the dialect of Brajbhasha began to supersede that of Avadhi. Both have been classified linguistically as Hindi (or '*hindavi*'). Akbar as well as Jahangir and other subsequent Mughal rulers are also known to have been conversant with spoken Hindi. This may have been the result of the expediency accepting the daughters of Rajput chieftains as brides. The mothers of Jahangir and Shah Jahan were both Rajputs women. Thus, over the course of Akbar's reign Hindi was in some cases literally becoming the mother tongue of the Mughal princes, even if Persian remained the primary public language, and ties to Turkish were maintained. She goes on to discuss the various *hindavi* poets in the Mughal court: Garg, Keshavdas, Indrajit, Faizi, Abdur Rahim and others.⁸

One of the contributing factors towards this development was the morphology of the Mughal towns. They were having a number of mercantile classes as their residents⁹ and were generally centres of commerce.¹⁰ These towns, apart from the nobles and Mughal bureaucracy, were inhabited by a multitude of religious scholars, both Hindu and Muslim,¹¹ artisans and craftsmen both skilled and unskilled, some self employed, others in the service of the state.¹² The mercantile class was probably one of the largest sections of these urban settlements. A morphological study of the Mughal towns shows that this large mercantile and non-bureaucratic sections of the population inhabited areas within the core of the town surrounded by the ramparts of the city walls. This was true for imperial cities like Agra, Fathpur Sikri, as

well as 'mercantile towns like Surat, Khambayat and Ahmadabad.

The siting of the habitation of the mercantile houses within the encompassing city walls reveals a close symbiosis of the mercantile (generally Hindu) with bureaucratic ruling (generally Muslim) classes in the Mughal Empire.

Within the fortified towns, the merchants, craftsmen, professionals and artisans however lived in separate wards or *muhallâs*. Thus we hear of *Chhîpitolâs* (ward of cloth-printers), *Tçlî wârâs* (ward of oil-pressers), *Mochi wârâs* (Shoe-maker's ward), *Jhaveri* or *Jauhari wârâs* (goldsmith's ward) in almost all the Mughal towns like Agra, Lahore and Shahjahanabad. It is also interesting to note that the centre of the town was reserved for the residential areas of the nobility and the powerful bureaucracy, and the peripheral areas, away from the centre, were reserved for the others.

Morphologically, another factor worth considering is that although the *muhallas* and the wards were divided on the basis of the professions, there does not appear to have been a division based on religious affiliations. Pelsaert is very categorical when, during the reign of Jahangir, while describing the city of Agra, he states:

...the whole place is closely built over and inhabited, Hindu mingled with Moslems, the rich with the poor...¹³

During the reign of Shahjahan, we are informed that Surat Singh, a petty official was living in a quarter in Lahore which was inhabited both by hindus and Muslims. His neighbour was a Muslim scholar named 'Abdul Karim'.¹⁴ This trend continued up till the eighteenth century. Thus in Shahjahanabad, Cambay and Ahmadabad we get *muhallas* with both Hindus and Muslims living in each other's neighbourhood.¹⁵

This inter-mixing of various religions in the same neighbourhood was not confined only to the professional and mercantile classes. The houses of the Hindu and Muslim nobles were also in close proximity to each other. Pelsaert while describing Agra mentions the *havelis* of various nobles near the fort. His list includes the names of 'Raja Bhoj Singh (?)', the father of Rai Ratan', Raja Kishandas, Khwaja Bansi, 'Raja Bet Singh (?)', Raja Man Singh, and Raja Madho Singh along with those of Bahadur Khan, Ibrahim Khan, I'tiqad khan, I'tibar Khan, Baqar Khan, Mahabat Khan etc.¹⁶

Naturally this living in close proximity to each other must have led to a better understanding of each others' ethos and culture.

Monseratte while describing the towns which he passed through is struck by two festivals being celebrated very conspicuously: The

muhartram and the *Holi*.¹⁷ Surprisingly no other festival is singled out for detailed description as these two.

The syncretic tendencies in urban centres¹⁸ were also the result of the manner of education being imparted to the general masses. The *maktabs* or schools in the urban centres were catering to both the Muslim and Hindu students. Miyan Shaikh ‘Abdullah Badauni, a Hindu convert to Islam, as a young student prior to his conversion attended classes and studied such Persian texts as *Bustân-i Sâ’dî*. Badauni mentions that one day when Miyan’s teacher was teaching him a lesson from *Bustân* and came to a couplet in praise of the Prophet, for whom the word ‘Chosen One’ was used, he enquired from his teacher “What is the meaning of this couplet? Explain it to me in *Hindî*”. The teacher enquired “What business have you (as a Hindu) with this *hikâyat* (story)?”¹⁹

During the reign of Shahjahan, Balkrishan Brahman ‘as per the tradition of the family’ was sent to study in the *maktab* of ‘Abdul Majid, a teacher ‘who had no equal in the city of Hisar’.²⁰ It was he who taught him how to write.²¹ Under his guidance Balkrishan gained knowledge of Persian and expertise in its idioms and metaphors.²² Balkrishan claims to have achieved competence in composing *inshâ* at the early stages while he was still at the *maktab*. He boasts that the children of the *madrasa* and the street, due to his expertise, nicknamed him ‘*munshi*’. He learned his arithmetic and *siyâq* (accountancy) in the office of one of the ‘*âmil* and *hâkim* (official) of Hisar.²³ He further brushed his knowledge of *inshâ* as the *shâgird* (student) of Shaikh Jalal Hisari with whom he remained for nine years.²⁴

Shan Sarang Surat Singh, the author of *Tazkira-i Pîr Hassû Tçli*, a petty bureaucrat during the reign of Shahjahan was similarly educated and trained at Lahore by Abdul Karim, a scholar of that city. Abdul Karim tutored Surat Singh and made him study works of poets like Yusufi, Ja’mi, Amwari, and Khaqani besides teaching him books like *Tuhfat ul Ahrâr Subhat ul Abrâr*, *Akhlâq-i Nâsiri* and various other *maktûbât* and works in prose and poetry.²⁵

In Banaras, Thatta, and Multan there were schools led by Brahmins where both Hindus and Muslims were imparted education.²⁶ During the 18th Century we hear of Munshi Meghraj who corrected the drafts of Tahmas Beg Khan, when the latter finished his diary in 1782.²⁷

Much information on the socio-religious climate of Lahore in contained in the *Tazkira* of Surat Singh. Although a Hindu, he was a devoted disciple of Pir Hassu Teli, a local saint of the oil-presser community who was born sometime in the 15th Century around 1483

AD at a place called Makhiwal on the banks of Chenab near Lahore. Hassu was attracted towards one of the Gorakhnâths, who soon recognized in him his 61st disciple.²⁸ Shaikh Kamal, one of the saint's disciples and the patron of Surat Singh designated the *maslak* (tradition) of Hassu as *malâmatiya*.²⁹ Apart from his connection with Islamic traditions, Hassu was endowed with a liberal mind. Though a formal Muslim, the saint never followed any of the basic observances and rituals prescribed by Islam. He never prayed in public or paid the *zakât*: for was he not praying all the time? He never had anything stored up, so where was the question of paying the religious tax? In every breath he circumvented the *Ka'aba* of his heart, so where was the need of the formal ceremony of *Haj*.³⁰ All this was in consonance with what the *malâmatiya* taught: that in order to appear pious, the observable attributes of peity were avoidable.

Surat Singh, and many others like him at Lahore, was naturally influenced by this philosophy. As a Hindu, he would never touch meat and applauds Akbar and Jahangir for prohibiting cow slaughter. He even goes to the extent of claiming that a famine resulted when an Afghan disciple of Hassu served the saint some meat. He is happy when someone fed Brahmins and gave them money and cows. But, on an intellectual plain, he stood for Hindu-Muslim unity and applauded the Mughal emperors for acts of tolerance.³¹ As a poet he composed *qasidas* in the praise of the prophet and Hazrat Ali.³² He attributes a number of mystical experiences to himself. During one such experience he saw himself performing Haj where he met the prophet of Islam and Hazrat Ali who beckoned him to come near and recite a *qasida* for him. During the course of other mystical experiences he also met numerous saints like Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Muhi'uddin (Ibn 'Arabi?), Baba Kapur, Farid Ganjshakar and many others in heaven.³³

Similar situation appears to have prevailed at Agra. Surat Singh describes a poetical session which he attended in that city during the reign of Shahjahan. In the *mushaira* an equal number of Hindu and Muslim poets of that period are described.³⁴ For example he mentions Dayâl, Chandrabhân Brahman and Nand Rai 'a famous, well known poet' amongst others.

From his account it also becomes clear that as far as his relations with his superiors in the administration were concerned, they were neither influenced nor marred on the basis of religion: Surat Singh and his brother Ganga Ram was meted a similar treatment by Todar Mal, the *hakim* of Batala, Aqil Khan or Safshikan Khan, under whom they served.³⁵

Crucial information regarding Guru Nanak and his tomb is also contained in the *Tazkira* of Surat Singh. Surat Singh reports that he visited the tomb of 'Baba' Nanak on the banks of Ravi at Kartarpur in 1647. He also alludes to the general belief that at the time of Guru Nanak's death, his body was neither buried nor cremated 'as it miraculously disappeared', and what remained was blooming flowers which were then divided and partly cremated and partly buried. In fact what he says is the spirit of Guru Nanak had become one with the other great spirits.³⁶ Once while performing the *tawâf* of the *dargâh* of Pir Hassu, he stumbled across 'Baba Nanak'. But then his Pir whispered to him 'O the Knower of Mysteries, the Truth is that he is not Nanak! If you see with the eyes of belief, then it is I who comes before your eyes time and again'.³⁷

In spite of Aurangzeb religious and political measures, the syncretic tendencies in the Mughal Empire continued to flourish side by side with the growing communal trends. Isardas Nagar, a contemporary of Aurangzeb, at one place opines:

The difference of religions and sects, which in reality affirm the being of God, should not be seen in sectarian and communal light.³⁸

Similarly we find Bhimsen rationalizing the sectarian clashes amongst Hindu groups at the holy shrines at Nasik and Trimbak:

Because of religious prejudices, battles break out between the rival groups and a huge number of persons often get killed, which shows that there is something wrong in the religion of both the groups.³⁹

He also speaks with scorn about the *sanyâsîs* who come to these religious places with elephants and forces of horsemen and armed soldiers.⁴⁰ He speaks with much contempt the religious practice of dedicating one's daughters to the shrine of Mahadeo at the hill of Khande Rao.⁴¹

The spirit of cooperation appears to have gained a stronghold in the Mughal urban centres which fortunately survived the policies of Aurangzeb.

There are many recorded instances of collaboration between the *bania* merchants and the Muslim mercantile classes. The Hindu and Muslim merchants of Surat not only did business with one another, but jointly owned cargo as well as the cargo-loading boats. In 1643, when the imperial ship *Ganjawar* was being loaded to sail for Jedda, it carried the cargo of both Hindu and Muslim merchants.

Thus we have *dastaks* issued to the officer in-charge (*upari*) of the ship *Ganjawar* for loading the ship with the goods of both Hindu and Muslim merchants.⁴² From these documents it appears that the Gujarat

merchants carried on joint trade from the Indian ports.

Then again in December 1722 Ahmad Chalebi, Abdu'r Rahman, and other merchants laid a charter of demands before Momin Khan, the Customer (*Mutasaddi*) of Surat on behalf of "the *mahajans* [Hindu bankers] and the people of the Port of Surat." Wherever these concerned specific individuals, these were invariably non-Muslims: Shahpur Parsi, seller of *ilacha-cloth*; Manikchand and Shahar (?) *baqqals* [Banyas]; in other grievances, the *mahajans* and *sahukars* are specifically mentioned as those aggrieved. In July 1726 "Mulla Muhammad, and Ahmad Chalebi and other merchants" of Surat again banded together to represent the grievances of "cloth merchants and *biyuparis*" among others, to the Castellan of Surat. When the nephew of the Castellan gave a reception to leading merchants to confirm reconciliation, the list of guests included nine named Muslims and five Hindus. A number of merchants however remained un-named.⁴³

In 1616 at Surat the entire community of merchants, including Hindu and Muslim, closed shop and threatened to leave the city:

...through some violence done by him to a chiefe Bannyane, the whole multitude assembled, shutt up their shoppes, and (as their custome), after a generall complaint to the Governor left the cittie, pretendeing to goe to the courte for justice.⁴⁴

Yet again in 1666 we find such 'joint action' which resulted out of a dispute with a *qâzi*:

...the Bannians having bound themselves under severe penalties not to open any of their shops without orders from their Mahager [*mahâjan*] or Generall Councill, there was not any provisions to be got; the tanksall (mint) and customshouse shut; no money to be procured...⁴⁵

Even in matters of law, the Mughal society appears to be joined as a single fraternity free from the communal cleavages. Although the Islamic law is explicit that for the purpose of testimony and evidence, the testimony of two male Muslim witnesses was essential,⁴⁶ yet at least in Gujarat, it appears that the Mughal judicial machinery was satisfied even if the two witnesses were non-Muslims.⁴⁷

Interestingly enough it appears that the forms of the Islamic legal system were also observed by the Brahmins and Baniyas. A number of legal documents from Gujarat which are drafted in Gujarati, generally begin with the usual affirmation "*Shri Ganeshaya-namah*", and do not carry the seal (*muhr*) of the *qazi*.⁴⁸ However, generally the Persian Documents mostly bear the *sarnama* "*Alif*", "*Allah-ho akbar*" or "*huwalghani*" as well as the seal of a *qazi*. Even amongst the documents

in Gujarati, S.C. Misra was able to locate a statement to the effect that there would be no objection on the vendor's part if the transaction was registered formally in the office of the *qazi*.⁴⁹

It is only in one document that we find the seal of a *mufti*.⁵⁰ But this being a copy (*naql*) of a *tamassuk* (a legal document of transaction), the *mufti* was probably only attesting the authenticity of the copy and not stretching his brief to interfere into the matters of civil law. However, the case could be referred to the court of the *mufti* for the legal opinion was sought, could be taken to the *mufti* by any of the parties concerned. From our documents it appears that even non-Muslims would not hesitate to seek the legal opinion of the *mufti*, who basically occupied a religious office.⁵¹ As per the legal opinion of the *mufti*, a case could be re-opened or rejected.

The question which arises at this juncture is whether the Mughals imposed the *shariat*, the Islamic law on their non-Muslim subjects. Or, were the latter free to practice their own rules and regulations?

The Quran is explicit as far as the settlement of disputes between the non-Muslims is concerned. According to it the followers of the various faiths were to be judged according to their own beliefs and laws.⁵² But if they approached the Muslim court of law, it was ordained: "If thou judge, judge in Equity between them. For Allah Loveth those who judge in equity".⁵³ The Muslim jurists too recommend the same.⁵⁴ Badauni informs us that Akbar had appointed *pundits* to administer justice.⁵⁵ He also appears to have given the Hindu *panchayats* a formal place in the judicial system.⁵⁶ Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar mentions certain Sanskrit judgements dating back to the reign of Akbar.⁵⁷

That the non-Muslims were not subservient to the Muslim law is further made clear from a *farman* of Shahjahan issued in 1634 regarding the Madan Mohan temple of Brindavan, Mathura. In this *farman*, Shahjahan not only refers to the worship taking place in the temple as '*ibadat-i ilahi*' (divine worship) but also refers to Hindus as *khuda parast* ('God worshippers'). While allowing the sounding of the gong as part of worship in that temple, Shahjahan nowhere mentions the *Shariat* (Islamic Law) to justify this act of tolerance.⁵⁸ Writing in 1759, Orme corroborates this view when he says that the various sects of the "Gentoos" (Hindus) in India were left free to follow their own religion and observances.⁵⁹ Mughal policy is more explicitly stated in the *Fatawa-i Alamgiri* that "Non-Muslims (*zimmis*) of a Muslim state were not subject to the laws of Islam. Their legal relations were to be regulated according to the precepts of their own faith".⁶⁰

Almost all of our documents testify that the *brahmins* and *baniyas* preferred to approach the court of the *qazi*. Thus we have a copy of the

court judgement (dated 27 February 1675) recording that Hira Ram son of Dharmanand came to the court of Qazi Muhammad Arif Anbiya and Qazi Mohuammad Anwar in the *kachehri* of Islamabad (Mathura) to fight a case for the possession of his single-storeyed house situated in the market area. The respondent in the case was also a Hindu, a certain Arjun who had taken the disputed house on rent but was now relinquishing it. The judgement records that during the case, that one of the judges himself went to the site to investigate the matter. And ultimately the matter was settled in favour of the plaintiff through the witness of Rattu Misr and six other.⁶¹

Secondly, a majority of them invoke provisions of the Muslim law *shara' / shari'at*. In fact, in one of the *hibanama*, dated 24 September 1684, the gifter, a *brahim*, warns the violator of the deed that by doing so, he would be “going against the sacred *shara'-i sharifah*”.⁶² Was this an allusion to the *shariat*, the Islamic law or just the law of the country? Another document, a *La-dawa*, help us reach an answer. In April 1736, Mirza Muhammad Taqi filed a suit on behalf of his wife, Bel Bai, who had converted to Islam, to get a share in the property of her deceased father, ‘as per the *shara'*. Nathi, the women’s mother declined, saying that as her daughter, Bel Bai, had converted to Islam, the demand could not be acceded to. The dispute was handed over to the ‘*ulama* (doctors of law) who gave the ruling that to give the share would be in contravention of the faith (*din*) as the law of succession (*wirsa*) does not apply to her. In view of this, Bel Bai had to withdraw her claim, and ultimately, due to the intervention of ‘certain individuals’, a sum of Rs. 10/- was given to her by the mother in view of her ‘poor condition’.⁶³ The proceedings of this case, recorded under the seal of Qazi Muhammad Ma’sum ‘*Khadim-i Shara-i Sharif*’ suggest that the term *shara* connote “law” and not necessarily “Islamic law”. The invocation of the *shara* was meant to be understood as “rule of law”, which once entered into, had not to be violated. It was perhaps this same “law”, which was dictated by the customs and traditions of the Non-Muslims, of which Manrique writes in his account of his passage through Orissa.⁶⁴

As a wife, the non-Muslim Gujarati woman was also entitled for ‘*mehr*’ (dower), that is, the right of a wife to a pre-determined sum (in cash or kind) payable to her by the husband. In one of the documents (dated 16th October 1660) a woman, Phulan, is said to have acquired a share in the ownership of a house from her husband as *mehr*.⁶⁵ Another document (*bainama-cum-hibanama*, dated 11 February 1686) is more explicit when it records that a *banya* (*baqqal*) purchased a residential building at Cambay for Rs. 701/- *Alamgiri*, a handsome amount for

1686, “for the payment of *mehr*” of his wife, and delivered the same to her along with gold and silver jewellery, utensils etc, in satisfaction of her *mehr* claims.⁶⁶ Was this *mehr* just a voluntary gift from the husband, or a case of Muslim influence on Gujarati non-Muslim communities?

In spite of these tolerant tendencies the first recorded riot in a Mughal town took place in 1711. On his accession to the throne Shah Alam Bahadur Shah ordered the inclusion of the Shi’ite term *wasi* (vice regent) after the name Ali in the *Khutba*, which was opposed by the Muslim orthodoxy at Ahmadabad, Delhi and Lahore.⁶⁷ In 1712 with the accession of Farrukhsiyar another controversy erupted at Delhi on the *khutba* of Shaikh Abdullah, a preacher from Multan. The Shaikh during a sermon in the Jami’ Masjid declared that Ali was not included in the list of *âl-i ‘abâ*, a belief held by the Shi’is. He also declared the Shi’i wrong in their beliefs. A theologian, Khwaja Muhammad Ja’far declared his views contrary to the Sunni traditions. The Shaikh, on a subsequent Friday was once again delivering his *khutba* when the listeners discovered a number of young men wearing Karbala rosaries (*tasbîh* made of the mud from Karbala, known as *khâk-i shifa’* among the Shi’i) around their neck sitting amongst the audience. On discovering them, the supporters of the Shaikh started abusing the Shi’i. In the ensuing confusion, a Hindu who had incidentally gone to hear the sermon was suspected of being a hired assassin. The mob surrounded him, who when cornered killed the *muezzin*. The frenzied mob then beat him to death. According to Khafi Khan, this riot changed the whole atmosphere of Delhi.⁶⁸

In the second year of the reign of Farrukhsiyar (1713), a ‘Hindu-Muslim riot’ erupted at Ahmadabad. The rioting in this incident was sparked by a minor incident during Holi. According to Khafi Khan, the incident occurred as a result of the coinciding of the festival of Holi with the celebrations of the Prophet’s birth. It is alleged that the Muslims during the course of their prophet’s birth celebrations on the next day of Holi sacrificed a cow which resulted in a tumult.⁶⁹ Ali Muhammad Khan on the other hand gives a different version of these Holi riots. According to him while the Hindu *baniyas* were engaged in celebrating the Holi and sprinkling colours, a Muslim passerby was also encircled and sprinkled with colour. As a result of this the Muslim mobs collected chanting ‘*deen deen*’ (Faith! Faith!), and looted the houses of the Hindus.⁷⁰ The rioting continued for a number of days. The Qazi of Ahmadabad, Qazi Khairullah refused to play a partisan role and favour the Muslims. He too as a result had to face the ire of the Muslim mob, which burnt his house. Order was restored only after the return of the

nâzim of the *sûba*. It is quite interesting to note that Ali Muhammad Khan hints that the riots were a result of trade rivalry between the leader of the Bohra merchants, Mulla Abdul 'Aziz and the *nagarseth* Kapur Chand Bhansali. According to Khafi Khan, Kapur Chand was a favourite of the *nâzim*. The matter was finally referred to Delhi, where, Khafi Khan says, the delegation of the Hindu merchants headed by Kapur Chand Bhansali was favourably received while the members of the Muslim delegation were imprisoned.⁷¹

In July 1720 communal tension was witnessed in the city of Agra over the issue of an inter-religious marriage. However the actual riots were somehow averted.⁷²

Almost during the same time, communal tensions flared up in Kashmir where a local Muslim leader demanded strict measures against the Hindu population. On the refusal of the *nâib-subadâr*, the self-styled Muslim leader Mahbub Khan, collected a number of rabble-rousers and attacked the Hindu houses. The house of the *nâib-subadâr* was also attacked. Mahbub Khan declared himself as the *nâib-subadâr* and took up the title of 'Dindar khan'. It was only after the arrival of Mun'in Khan Najm Sâni, who took over as the *nâib-subadâr* that the problem subsided. But before the calm could be restored, the Hindu-Muslim riot was converted into a Shi'a-Sunni clash after an attack was launched on the Shi'i houses in Charbîli and Hasnabad areas.⁷³

Subsequently two other riots occurred in Delhi in 1725 and 1729. The riots of 1725 were attributed to a controversy surrounding the conversion of a Hindu to Islam who claimed that his daughter being a minor was also automatically converted. This claim was naturally supported by a Muslim party. The other party contested this by claiming that the girl was not a minor. When on Imperial orders the girl was handed over to a Hindu jeweller, the Muslim mobs retaliated by forcibly circumcising a few Hindus.

The clash of 1729 was a result of yet another minor incident. A Hindu jeweller was passing by in *Chowk Sa'adullah Khan*, when someone let off a squib, which slightly burned his cloths. His servants in retaliation attacked the nearby shoe-makers shops and killed two Muslims. As at Ahmadabad, the Muslims shouted the slogan *deen! deen!* The Qazi and the *khatîb* reportedly sided with the Hindus and as a result faced the brunt of the muslim mobs.

Athar Abbas Rizvi while analyzing these riots of Delhi (and Kashmir) points out the emergence of a 'new leadership' of the Muslims who replaced the traditional Irani and Turani groups. This new group, comprising Arabs, Abyssinians, Turks and Afghans, was according to

him in the forefront of these riots.⁷⁴ Being foreigners they were new to the Mughal ethos. Bayly on the other hand finds the frequent mention of Afghan soldiery in these riots interesting. According to him, 'undisciplined mercenary soldiers isolated in an urban environment could easily provide the impetus for communal violence in the early stages of state-building'.⁷⁵ It further appears that the frequent 'communal tensions and riots which erupted in post-Aurangzeb period were a result of the weakening of a strong political authority. The strains between the various religious communities in the town were there since long, but a well-built central Mughal authority backed by its ideology of syncretism had thwarted any chance of strife. In spite of its weakness, we find that in almost all the incidents of strife, the Mughal state and officials sided not with their co-religionists but the wronged.

It would be wrong to call these early 18th Century clashes "communal", although they do reflect a loosening of social identities and a shrinking city space nurtured so carefully by Akbar and his successors. They, if at all, were the riots of vested interests from which the general masses remained aloof. If in 1713 clashes had occurred in Ahmadabad; in 1722 Ahmad Chalebi, Abdur Rahman and others fought for the cause of the Hindu brokers. The seeds sown by Akbar bloomed until the dawn of the colonial rule in India.

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